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## JOWETT'S COLLEGE SERMONS.<sup>1</sup>

What strikes us at first glance and what continues to the end to constitute the chief charm of these sermons by the late Master of Balliol, is the wonderful sympathy of the preacher with his audience. His intimate knowledge of college life, his keen insight into the peculiar temptations and difficulties to which the average college man is exposed, enable him to speak out of the fullness of his own experience with a directness and applicability to present conditions which it is difficult for one not having an acquaintance with college life to appreciate.

The author of these sermons knows the young man's heart, as one who has lost none of the freshness of youth with his increasing years. His ability to analyze motives, to sum up the various forces for good or ill, which constitute the undergraduate's social and intellectual environment, his reputation as a scholar, his broad culture and thorough knowledge of the world, his well-known moderation and dislike of exaggeration, give to these addresses a weight of authority and ripeness of judgment which no other book of the kind, with which we are familiar, possesses. To the casual reader, many of the subjects treated of in this volume may seem commonplace and beneath the dignity of sermons addressed to university men. But this, no doubt, is the very reason why they were so cordially received and appreciated.

The student-body felt that they were aimed not so much at their heads as at their hearts. That the preacher was not one who thought it necessary, because he was addressing college men, to air his knowledge or to tickle their fancies by the flow of his rhetoric and the eloquence of his rounded periods. He appealed to them as one who

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<sup>1</sup> *College Sermons.* By the late Benjamin Jowett, M.A., Master of Balliol College, Oxford. New York and London: Macmillan & Co., 1895.

thoroughly understood them, and was sincerely desirous of helping them in some definite and practical way. A glance at the contents will show how practical and to the point these sermons are.

Among the subjects treated, we find most excellent advice given on the "Art of Conversation," "The Value of Correct Speaking," "The Advantages to be Derived from Temperate Eating and Drinking," "The Use and Abuse of Money," "Excessive Shyness," "College Friendships," "Late Hours and Overwork," "The Value of Undergraduate Years." This last was the preacher's favorite theme. He repeatedly recurs to it, and upon every possible occasion seeks to impress upon his hearers a sense of its importance. On the very first page we are met with the somewhat paradoxical statement that "youth is the most solemn period of life." The meaning of this is more fully explained elsewhere, when the author tells us that there are no years in a man's life of equal importance to those spent in college. To quote his exact words: "I think we may say without exaggeration, that there are no years of equal importance, and that we shall never have such another start or beginning in life, in which all things (including the recollection of our faults and follies of youth) pass away and all things become new." Jowett's method, though sometimes varied, was first to outline in a broad, general way his subject, frequently stating categorically the different heads under which he proposed to treat his text, and then to fasten definitely upon a single point and to spend his whole strength in illustrating and developing it.

The many points of view from which a subject is looked at, as well as the preacher's ability to see both sides of a question, give a breadth and largeness of outlook which must make these sermons appeal to men of all shades of religious belief. The language is as simple and direct as possible. His editor tells us that Jowett was extremely careful, even fastidious, in the use of words, as is evidenced by the frequent alterations, erasures, and additions in the man-

uscript. The work of re-writing his sermons cost him so much care and trouble that this, no doubt, accounts for his extreme unwillingness to publish them during his life. To one of his sermons was found added the note: "This is the eighth time I have tried to re-write this sermon and have failed." Such extreme carefulness, while it insures clearness and elegance of diction, is not without the fault of making his language too severely classical for a good sermon style. A freer use of illustration, of which there is very little, and of what the rhetoricians call "animation of style," would have added greatly to the charm and permanent value of his sermons.

One looks almost in vain for some trace of that dry humor for which Jowett was so famous. We do, indeed, catch occasional flashes of his wit and sarcasm, as for example when speaking of the religious movements that have passed over England in the last half century, he dryly remarks that "religion has had a very small place in any party movement." But perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic of Jowett's preaching, if we may judge from this volume of his sermons, is his healthy optimism. He never despairs of a situation, neither is he blind to the dangers of the times. With a true prophet's eye, he sees underneath and beyond the changing currents of modern civilization, and confidently asserts that there is progress all along the line. In speaking of the relation of science to religion, which a few years ago when these sermons were delivered, was much more of a burning question than now, he exhibits a fearlessness and candor that must commend his utterances on this subject to all lovers of truth. To quote his own words: "And we may even go a step further and say that the progress of science and knowledge has been an aid and support of the religion of Christ, and is gradually becoming incorporated with it, and more than any other cause has tended to purify it from narrowing and hurtful superstitions, which we easily recognize in other religions, or in other forms of the Christian religion, not so easily in our own.

Therefore I say that this opposition is already melting away and becoming a matter of names, and that Christianity is in this respect not in a worse, but in a better position than formerly, because no longer wasting her energies on a fruitless struggle, but seeking to embrace all men and the good and true in all things within the limits of the gospel of Christ."

He finds the chief cause for the slow growth of religion in our own times to be a too great narrowness and exclusiveness in the Church of God herself. He notes with pleasure the decay of party spirit, and gives on this point the very wholesome advice "that where there is honesty and self-sacrifice and a love of truth, the matters in which we agree are far more important than those in which we differ can ever be." In speaking of the Church's attitude towards the social questions of the day, he held that a deeper knowledge of human nature has taught the Church the absurdity of trying to save men's souls while failing to relieve the physical wants of their bodies. In this respect he would, no doubt, sympathize with the efforts now being made to improve the material condition of the laboring classes as the first step towards their intellectual and moral advancement. His attitude toward the "higher criticism" may be inferred from the fact that he denies that we have any right to claim for the historical books of the Old Testament a greater degree of historical certainty than we find in other ancient histories. "We cannot exempt them from the principles of criticism which we apply to similar writings; the attempt to do so would destroy not only their authority but their meaning."

While others were trembling for the safety of the ark of God, he saw only the rising of a mighty tide of truth which men were powerless to stem or roll back. Hence one chief value of these sermons for a critical and truth-loving age is that there is no quibbling, no dodging of living issues, and no attempt to deceive. You cannot resist the feeling that the preacher himself is so securely intrenched in his own firm faith that he can afford to weigh every

question calmly and dispassionately. To those who are under the cloud of unbelief and equally to those who are called upon to deal with unbelief in all its various phases, we most heartily recommend the sermon from the familiar text: "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief."—St. Mark ix., 24. The profound knowledge of the human heart which this sermon displays could have been possible only in one who himself had keenly felt the difficulties in the way of the honest sceptic. Nothing can exceed the sound sense and good judgment with which he handles this delicate and difficult subject. Jowett finds the final and only convincing argument for christianity in a meek and holy life. "Too often where a man's vanity will not allow us to refute his arguments, when the mere narrowness of his mind prevents his comprehending the length, and breadth, and height of the love of God, or where our own feeble powers or want of learning may prevent our doing justice to the same, we may draw him to us by cords of sympathy. We may make him feel that we have something (if, indeed, we have it) that he has not, something that he would feign have, and that human nature itself seems to long for, that he sees to be the support of others on the bed of sickness and in the grave and gate of death."

"Inward experience" is the rock on which he seeks to plant the feet of the young disciple of Jesus and is really the key to his own theological position. "To live the life of Christ," this is the essence of a true and lively faith. The one test which he would apply to every doctrine and every religious movement is: "Does it make men better?" "That is the shortest, the simplest, and the most vital question which any man can ask about himself or about his Church, about the society in which he lives or about the country of which he is a citizen."

The Honorable Lionel A. Tollemache, the pupil and disciple of Jowett, in his delightful and highly appreciative memoir of his friend and teacher, has said that consciously or unconsciously Jowett "subordinated religion to morality."

Perhaps, if one may judge from his sermons, it would be more correct to say that he regarded morality as the sole test of religion. But if by religion is meant the formal and doctrinal side of christianity, there is a sense in which the remark is true. Yet if the author of these sermons seems to lay more stress upon holy and pure living than upon those means of grace which were meant to aid man in bringing forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, we cannot but feel grateful to him for insisting as strongly as he does upon the necessity for a high standard of conduct as the ultimate test of spiritual truth. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

In conclusion, the writer of this review would like to record the pleasure and profit which he has personally derived from a careful perusal of this volume, and he would further most cordially recommend it to all interested in the training and education of the youth of our country, and more especially to the clergy who are charged with this grave duty.

W. A. GUERRY.